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ABSTRACT

Rental of outdoor equipment is an increasingly popular element of collegiate outdoor programs. It is important for the outdoor programmer to be familiar with trends over the past 10-20 years to recognize why participants and programs need this program option. The reasons for student participation and departmental developments should be considered. It is also important to recognize that as the outdoor field grows, there is a need to provide a safe, fun, learning experience for the participants and the programs. One way to ensure this is to research which gear fits into the budget and location of the department and to develop a plan of operations. This plan often comes in the form of a manual to ensure that safe practices and procedures are consistent and are the foundation of the program and to standardize operations for staff and students. The manual may be considered a work in progress. As the program grows, procedures must change with new equipment, new adaptations to university policies, and departmental demand. Examples are given of manuals developed in several university programs. Two tables present types of equipment most commonly rented by programs, and scenarios involving lost or damaged equipment. (TD)

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OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT MANUALS: THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE

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Introduction

In the discussion of outdoor equipment rental development and operation, there are several factors which need to be addressed. It would be important for the outdoor programmer to be familiar with current trends over the past one or two decades to recognize why participants and programs need this program option. In addition, there are important considerations involved in order to properly plan and operate outdoor equipment rental programs. Lastly, in order to offer an organized program designed to meet the needs of the department and the university, it is necessary to ascertain goals, policies, and procedures to place in a document to standardize operation for both customers and staff. After completion of this process, one can determine the best type of outdoor equipment rental operation for the students, the university community, and the department.

Rationale

Oftentimes, the equipment rental and off campus outings go hand in hand. In Martini's (1984) survey it was found that 84 institutions offered the off campus outing, and 83 institutions offered outdoor equipment rental. Similar results were found in a 1989 survey of outdoor rental programs in the South. The investigators found the same number who had outdoor equipment also conducted off-campus outings (Taylor and Gilbert, 1990).

This is not always the case. Watters (1986) cited a paper prepared by the University of Idaho Outdoor Program noting the need to build a solid activities program prior to establishing a rental center. The rationale was that a program that is all equipment rental and no trips may not experience success because if the students do not have a vehicle to get on trips which would include introducing them to new outdoor activities, then the rental program would not be well utilized. Once the trips program is successful, then it is time to assess equipment need (Watters 1980). The reverse philosophy of the rationale at the University of Idaho was found in a study of Texas Outdoor Recreation Facilities. Of 25 institutions responding to the survey, 17 offered outdoor equipment rental programs; however, only eight of these offered non-credit, off-campus outings (Taylor, Ashley, Keck and Kott, 1993). At Vanderbilt, the new 3000 square foot outdoor equipment rental center has altered the focus and importance of equipment. Prior to this building's construction, the small size of the rental center limited the equipment selection and number; therefore, the gear was tied to the success of the trips program. Since this facility opened and the inventory has doubled or even tripled in some cases, equipment rental has grown in importance as clubs, organized groups, and other programs utilize this service. (personal communication, Linda Potter-Rosenkranz).

RC 022 534

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Regardless of which model is used to start the rental center, its importance cannot be understated in a growing collegiate outdoor program.

History and Trends

In 1983, the NIRSA Subcommittee on Outdoor Recreation surveyed members on a wide variety of outdoor recreation topics to determine the current status, practices, and trends in programming. Equipment was one of the four components of this study. It was found that 83 of 85 respondents offering outdoor programs had equipment rental. A summary of the survey equipment category results indicated the following:

Table I

Equipment Item	# of programs renting	% of total Sample
Backpacks	82	99
Tents	82	99
Stoves	75	88
Sleeping Pads	73	86
Sleeping Bags	73	86
Canoes	72	86
Cook Kits	68	82
Fuel Bottles	67	81
X-C Skis	63	76
Coolers	59	71
Canoe Carriers	56	67
Lanterns	54	65
Day Packs	53	63
Compasses	49	59
Snow Shoes	49	59
Shovels	39	47
Canteens	35	41
Dry Bags	29	35
Headlamps	17	20
Downhill Skis	16	19
Bicycles	16	19
Rafts	8	10
Kayaks	7	8
Sailboats	4	5
Boat Trailers	3	4
Climbing Shoes	0	0

Martini, 1984

In a 1991 NIRSA Outdoor Subcommittee survey, it was found that the popularity of the six items in Martini's 1984 survey were almost identical but tents and sleeping bags passed backpacks in importance. Lantern moved up from twelfth to a tie for sixth. It might also be noted that the whitewater kayaks, sailboard/sailboats, and climbing shoes made

dramatic gains. Committee Chair, Wayne Morford reported that the average program had 14 two-person tents, 42 sleeping bags, 12 four-person tents, 19 backpacks, and 11 backpacking stoves. The replacement value of these five items in a "average program" is in excess of $10,000. Therefore, noting the investment the university and department makes in an outdoor equipment rental program is significant.

A similar comparison can be made outside of NIRSA surveys. In a 1989-90 study, Webb (1991) found 116 programs that derived some monetary benefits from equipment rental. This income was listed as $1,750,993. Over the course of approximately five years, the second edition found an increase in these numbers of 7% to 124 programs. Revenue on the other hand had increased to $2,065,387 for an 18% increase (Webb, 1996).

When the volume of equipment, the number of programs, and the revenue generated necessitates that outdoor programmers be organized and efficient to provide a quality product. This ensures firs class customer service to our students. Also, considering both the capital outlays (usually university funds) and revenue generated, the outdoor programmer must have policies, procedures and standard to safeguard the university's investment and to ensure proper accounting.

Manuals

Watters (1986) suggests that the programmer start slowly and gradually build up an inventory of equipment. The same can be said for the outdoor equipment manual.

Prior to opening an outdoor equipment rental program, one should consider developing a manual of operations to cover the many aspects of the operation. At first, this may only be a folder with policies and procedures and forms. This "how to" folder will serve as a basis to train the staff, allow for consistent procedures, forms for rental and return, and standardization of inventory and accounting procedures.

At the University of Northern Iowa, this approach was utilized in starting the new UNI Outdoor program in 1997. Other programs, both in Iowa and elsewhere, were contacted to determine appropriate equipment needs and suppliers, state regulations, and forms used in rental. In starting a program, one can look at the "manual" as a work in progress because the inventory growth and procedure changes. As the program grows, procedures must be changed with the addition of new types of equipment, new adaptations to university policies, and departmental demand. For example, the program began with backpacking and camping gear; however, with addition of canoes and snow shoes, UNI's forms and policies needed to be changed to allow for the new equipment.

At Texas Tech University, the outdoor program had a long history of faculty and graduate assistant leadership. Upon hiring a full time staff, it was decided that he first order of business was to increase the size of the inventory. This was to be done only by increasing the numbers of already established rental items. Therefore, a manual was developed within the first year using existing models at other schools with similar inventories. By creating this manual, Texas Tech's employees and student customers had standardized forms, policies, and procedures to review anytime there was a question or conflict.

Regardless of whether the "manual" is a loose leaf notebook work in progress or a bound guide, the decision should not be whether to have a written plan, but at what time. At Iowa State University, the outdoor recreation program published the "Employee Handbook and Operation Manual" as part of the growth of the program (White and Morford, 1984). This was developed for equipment rental and trip leaderships because there was a need to standardize policies. Since its first printing, this document has been revised four times to update policies. This also allows the program to set standards and procedures so new

employees can learn the "way we do it at Iowa State." (personal communication, Scott White) This is consistent with Darst and Armstrong's (1980) belief that a program is only a good as their staff. The personnel working in the rental center must have the skills to maintain and repair gear, not only for customer service but also for safety. Shoddy equipment invites legal action (Watters, 1986). While many students have good outdoor experience, it is very rare for anyone to be "read made" for an outdoor program staff position (Darst and Armstrong, 1980). Watters (1980) further states that employees need training and guidance. A manual can help provide the training and guidance needed to properly train employees within a program.

What Ifs in Outdoor Equipment Rental

Rental Activity	Scenario	Dilemma
1. raft rental (12')	damaged or destroyed	What do you charge? Lost: full replacement price or prorated damage-professional repair or inhouse
2. tent rental	student says they turned it in but you can't find it & rental form is in return file	Was it an error of the front desk, student, or equipment staff? Who pays?
3. group sleeping bag rental	Kappa Alpha rents 25 bags upon return, 5 are dirty & 2 are missing	Does pledge who picked up equipment pay? the fraternity? or.....
4. lantern rental	student returns lantern & glass is broken, no mention on rental form of break	Was this an equipment staff error or rentor problem? Who pays?
5. canoe (4) rental (+paddles/vests/trailer)	students return on Monday with horror story of river rising, cold water, capsizing canoeing – they swam for safety (losing all 4 canoes)	What do you do? students pay? staff goes "fishing", prorate losses? replacement value?
6. snow ski rental	student falls & toe binding comes off and is buried in the snow	Student pays? contact Salomon to have them replace "faulty" binding? or ....

These are the types of questions one can attempt to answer with standardized forms, policies and procedures. These must be in written form in case the renter believes the rule are changing just for his/her situation. Having them in written form will also allow administrators to handle appeals and other types of complaints. However, anytime one deals with people and the outdoors, it is impossible to foresee every exception or problem. The manual will help the employees and the program deal consistently with our students.

Summary

In summary, outdoor equipment rental and related outdoor recreation activities are a popular and ever increasing activity for collegiate outdoor programs. The reasons for student participation and departmental developments should be considered. It is also incumbent to recognize that as we grow there is a need to provide a safe, fun, learning experience for the participants and the programs. One way to ensure this is to research which gear fits into the budget and location of your department and to develop a plan of operation. This plan oftentimes comes in the form of a manual in order to ensure that safe practices and

procedures are consistent and are the foundation of the program. While procedures and specific topics may vary from program to program and will surely change over time, it can serve as the basis from which to begin. This manual can help ensure that the goals of the program are being met and the participants all receive the most benefit from their experience.

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Panel Biographical Sketches

W. T. Taylor, Middle Tennessee State University, Director of Intramurals & Outdoor Pursuits, B.S. Miss. State U., M.A. Southern Methodist U., & Old Miss too. Supervised outdoor equipment rental programs at Ole Miss, UAB, Texas Tech, SHSU, and for the past five years at MTSU. MTSU's inventory at approx. $100,000 in water sports (rafts, kayaks, canoes, funyaks, and trailers), backpacking & camping gear (likes boats best!).

Jordan Messer, Texas Tech University, Assistant Director of Recreational Sports in charge of the Outdoor Program. B.S. & M.S. U. of Nebraska Lincoln. Supervise outdoor equipment rental center at Texas Tech U. since 1998. TTU's inventory at approx. $75,000

in water sports (kayaks, rafts, canoes, wind surf boards & trailers) snow skis / snow boards / shoes, backpacking gear & camping gear (snow boarding rules!).

Andy Martin, University of Northern Iowa, Coordinator of UNI Outdoors. B.S. Sam Houston State U., M. S. Middle TN State U. Supervised outdoor equipment rental at SHSU, MTSU, UNI. UNI's inventory at approx. $45,000 in water sports (canoes & trailers), winter sports (x–c skies & shoes), climbing, gear, camping / backpacking gear & roller blades (supremo boater!).

Mitch Hoffman, Middle Tennessee State University, Graduate Assistant in Outdoor Pursuits. B.S. U. Northern Iowa, M.S. in progress. Supervises outdoor equipment rental at MTSU (rock hound!).

Sean Hager, Middle Tennessee State University, Intern in outdoor Pursuits. B.S. in progress. Supervisor in outdoor equipment rental at MTSU (wants it all!).

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